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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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19 October 1983

Rangoon Bombing Incident --
The Case Against The North Koreans

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Summary

Confessions *are still lacking, but there is very strong circumstantial evidence linking North Korea to the attempted assassination of President Chun in Rangoon. The methods of operation and the equipment carried by the ethnic Koreans apprehended by Burmese authorities following the bombing are similar to those of numerous North Korean agent teams that have infiltrated South Korea in the past. The radio-detonated explosives used in Rangoon are similar to those used in a North Korean attempt to assassinate President Park Chung Hee in Seoul in 1970. The movements of a North Korean ship and North Korean diplomats' familiarity with the Rangoon ceremony and the physical layout of the site provide further circumstantial evidence of North Korean responsibility.*

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The Evidence

The bomb at the Martyrs' Mausoleum in Rangoon clearly was aimed at the South Korean delegation.

- Wreath-laying at this site is an indispensable ceremonial duty for any visiting head of state, but few high-ranking Burmese officials are normally in attendance. Moreover, Burmese dissidents have not displayed the technical sophistication apparent in the 9 October bombing.
- The three explosive devices used in the bombing were attached to the roof of the mausoleum directly above the area where the South Korean delegation would be expected to gather.

The North Koreans had an excellent opportunity to survey the scene and plan an operation. A delegation from North Korea's Supreme Peoples Assembly visited Burma and performed the same wreath-laying ceremony less than two months before Chun's visit. 25X1

Within the first three days after the bombing, three individuals, identified by Burmese authorities as ethnic Koreans, were engaged by security forces in the vicinity of Rangoon. The violent resistance of these individuals--one Korean and at least three Burmese were killed--and the fact that they were caught moving south toward the mouth of the Rangoon River, suggest that the Koreans were attempting to exfiltrate from Rangoon after having carried out the bombing. 25X1

A North Korean ship, the Tonggon Aeguk-Ho, was in port at Rangoon from 17-23 September, unloading equipment for a North Korean aid project in Burma. The ship left Burmese waters sometime after 23 September for Colombo, Sri Lanka, where it reportedly remained until 6 October. The ship's location since that date is not clear, but the timing of its arrival in Burma would be consistent with the dispatch of an agent team.

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[REDACTED]

Equipment used in the bombing and many items carried by the suspects provide some of the strongest evidence against the North. None of the equipment has been identified as of North Korean origin, but it is similar or identical to gear used by North Korean agents who have infiltrated South Korea. These items include a silenced .25 caliber Belgian pistol, daggers, and grenades. In addition, a Morse radio transmitter and Japanese transistor receiver were recovered along with foods (rice powder, canned meat, candy bars) and medicine (pain killers, antibiotics, salt tablets). [REDACTED] 25X1

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] the evidence in hand does not readily implicate any group other than the North Koreans. (C NF)

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Numerous features of the Rangoon operation are consistent with North Korean agent operations.

- Nearly all North Korean agent operations into South Korea in recent years have been conducted by three-man teams.
- P'yongyang's infiltrators have attempted suicide using hand grenades when threatened with capture.
- As with the suspects captured in Burma, infiltrators from the North have been well-indoctrinated and offer maximum resistance to capture or, when captured, resist cooperation. [REDACTED] 25X1

Rangoon now has publicly linked the captured Koreans to the bombing, and Burmese investigators reportedly are virtually certain that P'yongyang authored the attack. Domestic insurgents are no longer under serious suspicion, and the most active domestic group--the Karen National Union--quickly disavowed any involvement.

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The Record of Past Assassination Attempts

Although the Rangoon incident appears to be the first instance in which the North Koreans have themselves carried out an attempt on the life of a South Korean leader outside South Korea, it has the earmarks of a North Korean agent operation. P'yongyang has adopted a wide variety of approaches to assassinating South Korean leaders over the past two decades.

A 1968 attack on the Blue House was a military operation. North Korean commandos were intercepted by South Korean security forces in mountainous terrain immediately behind the presidential mansion and in the ensuing fight all but one of the northerners were killed. The lone survivor was imprisoned for a time but subsequently he adopted a strong anti-P'yongyang line and was taken on extensive speaking tours throughout South Korea.

25X1 An attempted assassination of President Park in 1970 was very similar to the Rangoon bombing.

- A terrorist reported by Seoul to be a North Korean was killed while planting a bomb at the National Cemetery in Seoul.
 - The bomb was a remote controlled claymore-type explosive, apparently with fragmentation pellets. The device was placed under the eaves of the tile-roofed Shrine Gate where President Park and other high officials were scheduled to participate in a wreath-laying ceremony three days later on 25 June-- South Korea's memorial day.
 - Equipment recovered at the explosion site included counterfeit South Korean identification documents, as well as a North Korean-made pistol, battery, compass, knife and field garb.
 - A cache of North Korean agent gear discovered 10 days later in a mountain cave south of Seoul included counterfeit South Korean IDs for three different men, a rifle, machinegun, grenades, communications equipment, medicine, exfiltration equipment, and foodstuffs including cooked rice powder. Much of the equipment was of North Korean manufacture.
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In August 1974 a disaffected young Korean resident in Japan, Mun Se Kwang, entered South Korea under a Japanese alias and attempted to shoot President Park at South Korea's national day ceremony.

-- Although the President was not injured, Mrs. Park was killed in the attack.

-- Mun was executed soon after the incident

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P'yongyang's Public Position

No group has claimed responsibility for the Rangoon bombing and, despite the evidence, the North Koreans continue to deny involvement in the incident.

-- On 12 October, the North Korean news agency issued an authorized statement that termed Seoul's charges as "preposterous and ridiculous" and declared that "we, by nature, have never undertaken an act of terrorism, nor will we."

-- The statement criticized President Chun for using the incident to incite North-South confrontation and it noted that North Korea was "on the highest alert."

P'yongyang has also been publicizing foreign statements alleging that the South Koreans were responsible for the incident.

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- North Korean clandestine radio broadcasts have sought to tie the attack to an unspecified "dissident group" and have characterized the incident as "deserved" punishment for Chun.
- During the past year or so, these clandestine broadcasts have sought to portray Chun increasingly as a ruler exposed to constant danger from South Korean dissidents and even from within his own military establishment. [redacted] 25X1

These same broadcasts in recent weeks have carried repeated warnings--also attributed to dissidents in the South--that President Reagan will face "stern punishment" if he visits Seoul. [redacted]

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- 1 - DDI Registry (7E47)
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